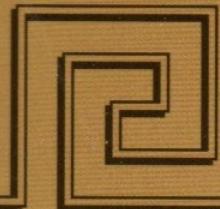


ENGLISH

COSTIS DAVARAS



# The palace of Knossos

BRIEF ARCHAEOLOGICAL GUIDE • PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES FOR THE PERIOD 1959-1978



THE PALACE OF  
**KNOSSOS**  
BRIEF ILLUSTRATED  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL GUIDE

**Photographic archives of “HANNIBAL” Editions  
for the period 1959-1978.**

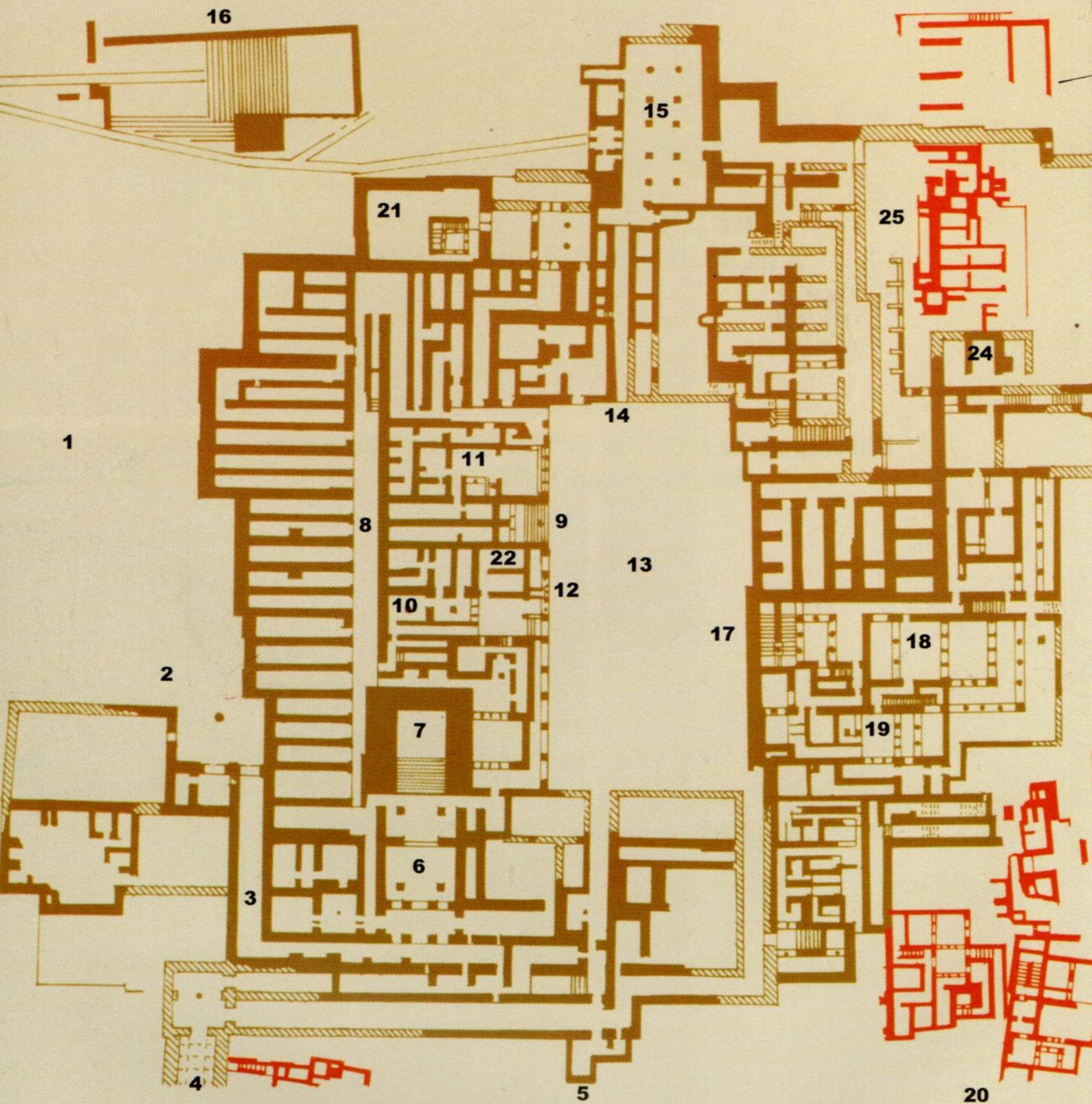
TEXT

**COSTIS DAVARAS**

Emeritus Ephor of Antiquities  
Emeritus Professor of Prehistoric Archeology  
of Athens University

**ATHENS**

**HANNIBAL PUBLISHING HOUSE**



**6. The palace of Knossos. (plan C. Iliaki).**

1. West Court.
2. West Porch.
3. Corridor of the Procession.
4. Stepped Portico.
5. South Entrance.
6. South Propylon.
7. Grand Staircase.
8. Long Corridor.
9. Stepped Porch.
10. Pillar Crypts.
11. Throne Room.
12. Tripartite Shrine.
13. Central Court.
14. North Entrance Passage.
15. «Customs House».
16. «Theatral Area».
17. Grand Staircase.
18. Hall of the Double Axes.
19. «Queen's Megaron».
20. Private houses.
21. North Lustral Basin.
22. Temple Repositories.
23. East Bastion.
24. Magazines of the Giant Pithoi.
25. Protopalatial magazines.

**7.**  
General view  
of the palace of Knossos.



**ISBN: 978-618-5235-10-9**  
**Athens 2019**

**Cover plate (on the front):**

*Grand Staircase of the East Wing: The “Veranda of the Royal Guard”. In the background a replica of the fresco with figure-of-eight shields.*

**Cover plate (on the back):**

*“Customs’ House” and the west portico with the relief fresco of the charging bull.*

*Photographs by*  
**HANNIBAL**

*Colour reproductions – Printing*  
**ANTONIADIS S.A.**

*Translated by*  
**ALEXANDRA DOUMAS**

“COPYRIGHT HANNIBAL”  
The partial or total republication  
of the text and images is prohibited.



***Editions “HANNIBAL” Since 1957***  
46 Kifissodotos str., Ano Petralona, Athens 11852  
Tel-Fax: 210-3453941  
e-mail: [hannibalshop@gmail.com](mailto:hannibalshop@gmail.com)  
[www.hannibalshop.com](http://www.hannibalshop.com)

# THE PALACE OF KNOSSOS

## General Survey

The centre of the refined Minoan civilisation of the palatial period, which flourished in Crete during the 2nd millennium BC and was one of the great civilisations of the ancient world, are the four palaces: Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia and Zakros. These impressive edifices were built in around 1900 BC in geographically suitable locations, ensuring direct connection with the rich rural hinterland and the important sea routes of the Aegean and Mediterranean. Smaller "palaces" existed too, seats of the local governors, such as that at Gournia. The palaces resulted from the needs imposed by a centralised economy and social organisation, apparently headed by a "Priest king", of which the legendary Minos, known from classical Greek tradition, was the prototype. It has also been suggested that the several palaces presuppose several kings, certainly without any mutual political rivalry and probably with some degree of independence, under the hegemony of the king of Knossos, who may have had religious supremacy. Whatever the case, the leading role of Knossos in religion, as well as in the island's administration, legislature and economy is quite obvious.

The large palaces served many purposes. They should not be compared with those of recent times and regarded only as the residence of the king, his family, courtiers, artists and other attendant personnel, as well as functioning as the axis of the sophisticated life of a highly stratified society, which that of prehistoric Crete surely was. The Minoan palaces, surrounded by opulent villas and an extensive urban community were also the seat of administration and justice, as well as important commercial and manufacturing centres and nodes of control of the economic and productive activities of a wider area. Stored in the palaces' vast magazines were not only goods destined for local consumption by their royal and other residents, but mainly produce for redistribution and trade, income from "taxes" which were, of course, levied in kind since money was still unknown. The palaces were at the same time workshops, for all important forms of art were produced there.



8. General view of the first floor (Piano Nobile) from the north. To the left the Central Court. In the background the Mount Juktas.

9.

*The Corridor of the Procession which leads from the West Porch to the inside of the palace. In the middle a "causeway".*



10.

*The West Court and the monumental west façade of the palace.*



Equally important was the religious role played by the palaces. Their west wings in particular were dedicated to the cult of the Mother Goddess, but there were religious elements everywhere and the palaces were simultaneously major shrines and centres of religious life, ceremonies and rituals.

The architecture of the Minoan palaces owes something to the enormous temple-palaces of the East. A common feature is the rectangular central court, though in Crete this is not delimited by rectilinear external walls. On the contrary, the Minoan palace developed from the inside outwards, starting from the large court which comprised its structural focus as well as being the axis of its entire life. Thus the external facades frequently terminated in butts and recesses. In general we should bear in mind that although the basic plan of the palaces had been conceived of from the outset in detail, its final form was in a way the natural outcome of a long evolutionary process with successive buildings and numerous architectural phases. The walls were covered with plaster decorated with paintings in the most important rooms. Built square pillars were frequently used for support, as well as round wooden columns characteristically tapering towards the base. These peculiar columns, a diagnostic feature of Minoan architecture, basically consisted of upside-down tree trunks, this inversion preventing the possibility of them sprouting and also protecting the base from the rain.

The palaces were destroyed several times but were rebuilt after each catastrophe. In all they stood for some six hundred years. Two principal architectural phases can be distinguished: the Early Palaces which were destroyed in around 1700 BC, perhaps by violent earthquakes, and the new Palaces which were erected on the same site. Eventually these too were destroyed in circa 1450 BC along with most of the other towns and villages of Crete, but the palace of Knossos suffered less serious damage than the others. There are signs here that after the disaster a new dynasty of Achaean kings was installed. They were Greek-speaking and ruled Crete along the same lines as a Mycenaean kingdom. This period lasted until the final catastrophe, a conflagration in the palace, dated to about 1375 BC or even later. The Achaean dynasty apparently disappeared and the site was never rebuilt or reused as a palace.

The largest palace in Crete was at Knossos, built upon the ruins of an extensive and very important Neolithic settlement. It was more or less square, 150 × 150 metres, and covered an area of 20,000 sq. m. All around was a large town with a population estimated as comparable with that of present-day Herakleion, though Hood thinks it was much smaller. Neither the town nor the palace were protected by fortification walls, a unique phenomenon for that era, since there was no threat of internal war or external invasion, for the sea was well guarded by Minos' fleet. At that time Crete, though small in area and population, became the first naval power in world history and the "Thalassocracy" of Minos has remained legendary.

The complex plan of the palace of Knossos and the fact that the double axe (labrys), the most sacred symbol of Minoan religion, is incised many times on walls and pillars, prompted the notion that this building was the labyrinth, dwelling place of the labrys. A recently discovered Linear B tablet (ill. 48) has disclosed the existence of a cult title "My Lady of the Labyrinth". After the palace's destruction the ruins were even more labyrinthine in appearance and so the specific meaning of the word was derived, which passed from Greek to Latin and so into most of the modern European languages.

Knossos survived in later Greek times as one of the mighty city-states of Dorian Crete. Traditional subjects such as the labyrinth and the Minotaur were depicted on its coinage.

Following a preliminary excavation in 1878 by the Herakliote antiquarian Minos Kalokairinos, the palace was systematically explored by the English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans and his collaborators from 1900 to 1905. Work has been continued intermittently ever since by the British School of Archaeology.



10a.

"Customs' House" and the North Entrance with the relief fresco of the charging bull.



## **Visit to the Palace**

The palace is built on a levelled hilltop (ill. 7) which is not so obvious nowadays because the west slope has been covered with infill from the excavation. The visitor first enters the West Court (ill. 10), a large paved area resting on an outer retaining wall with a broad ramp to the west, forming the entrance. At the far end stands the monumental west facade of the palace, its massive blocks blackened by the great fire which destroyed the building for the last time. In the West Court there are three enormous circular pits with built walls, resembling three shallow wells, known as "kouloures". In the two westernmost "kouloures" traces of Protopalatial houses were found, one of which had a flight of red plastered stairs and was surely of a religious character. These early dwellings were obsoleted when the court and "kouloures" were made. There are similar "kouloures" in the palace of Mallia also. Their function is uncertain, though they were probably originally granaries and not cisterns. In a later phase the discarded broken pottery from the palace was thrown into them. The court is traversed by slightly raised causeways which were probably used for sacred processions and other ceremonies or simply as pathways. There are also two altars. One is built in front of the monumental west facade, perhaps on the site of the original entrance to the Early Palace which was blocked in the course of subsequent remodelling of the facade. The foundations of the Early Palace are still visible as a row of large flagstones in the pavement of the court. Maybe the altar was built here because the space between the earlier and later facade was considered holy.

A "causeway" across the court leads to the west entrance of the palace, the West Propylon. This porch had a large wooden column of estimated height 5.50 m. standing on an alabaster base and a wall-painting of bull-sports on its east wall. Next to it was a guard lodge and reception room which perhaps contained a throne for the duty officer controlling the entrance. Behind a double door at the far end of the porch begins the long Corridor of the Procession (ill. 9). This was a ceremonial entrance, thus named after the wall-painting which adorned the corridor walls in two superimposed zones consisting of figures of boys and girls, estimated as several hundred, forming a procession. Some of the youths were playing musical instruments and clad in sacerdotal robes. The central figure of the wall-painting represented a goddess.

The “Cup bearer” (ill. 13) is especially famous; sun-tanned, curly-haired, broad-shouldered and slim-waisted, he is a typical Minoan. The youth holds a heavy conical rhyton of stone, a special libation vessel, and wears a seal-stone around his left wrist. The Corridor of the Procession, which is only preserved for part of its length, skirts the southwest corner of the palace and the small South Entrance, leading eventually to the South Propylon (ill. 12), a magnificent columned structure with three entrances closed by doors. As with the other frescoes in the palace, a replica of part of the wall-painting of the procession has been placed in the restored Porch (ill. 11) which originally covered a significant part of it. The propylon, paved with large flagstones, and the so-called Grand Staircase, bordered by strong walls and colonnades, led from the ground floor to the first floor, known as the piano nobile, an architectural term borrowed from the Italian Renaissance (ill. 8). On this floor is a series of formal rooms, almost completely restored, including the “Tricolumnar Shrine”, “Great Hall” with two columns, “Sanctuary Hall” with six columns and other chambers with conventional names (ill. 14). Evans claimed that there was a Greek temple, probably dedicated to the goddess Rhea, to the east of the Grand Staircase, though his evidence was scant and it was demolished in the course of the excavations. Next to the south entrance is a copy of the well-known relief fresco of the “Priest-king” or “Prince of the Lilies” (ill. 16). According to a recent study this rich yet simply clad figure with bare torso and crown or diadem with standing lilies surmounted by three large backward-trailing peacock plumes constitutes, unfortunately, an erroneous reconstitution of fresco fragments belonging to three different figures, two boxers and a priestess, who wore the lily crown.

Leading to the palace south entrance was an impressive structure known as the Stepped Portico (ill. 17) which belonged to the Protopalatial period and has left very few traces. There were columns on its west side only, while there was a high blank wall to the east. In order to enter the portico and palace one had to pass over a large monumental viaduct with stepped channels. The road to southern Crete and the Libyan Sea commenced here. A small building at the roadside was probably intended as a hostelry for travellers and was called the “Caravanserai” (ill. 20) by the excavators.

There is a well and large public footpath of stone, in which the water still

11.

*The South Propylon with replicas of sections of the Procession Fresco.*



12.

*The monumental South Propylon and the Grand Staircase of the upper storey.*



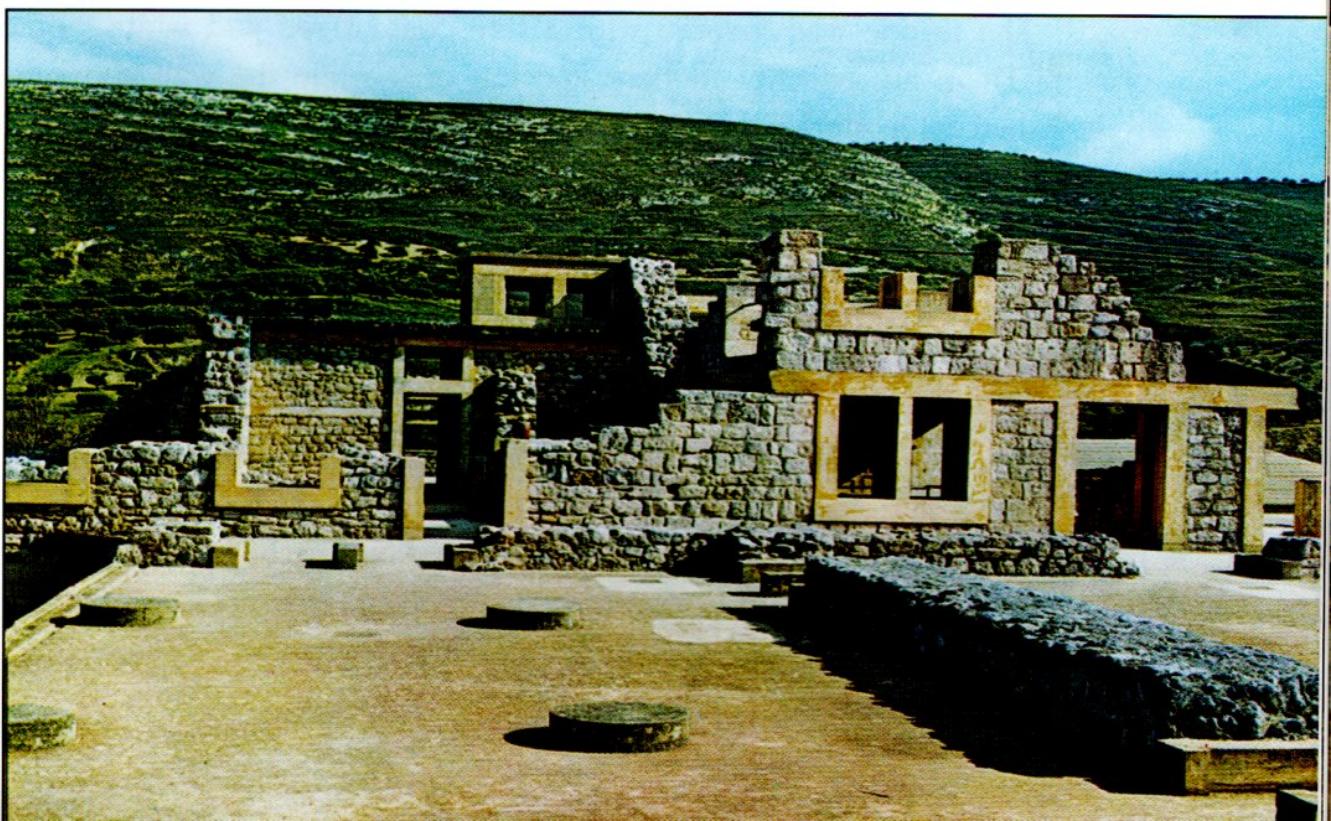
13.

"The Cup-Bearer": a figure from the Procession Fresco, a representative type of a Minoan.  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



14.

The "Sanctuary Hall" in the upper (Piano Nobile) of the Wing. In the background restored rooms.



runs, in the "Caravanserai". Of considerable importance is a wall-painting which adorned the upper part of a wall, a frieze of partridges and hoopoes (ill.21). Even further south, again at the roadside, stands the large royal "Temple-tomb" (ill. 18, 19) a two-storeyed building with court and hypostyle crypt. In the centre of the rock-cut burial chamber stands a square pillar.

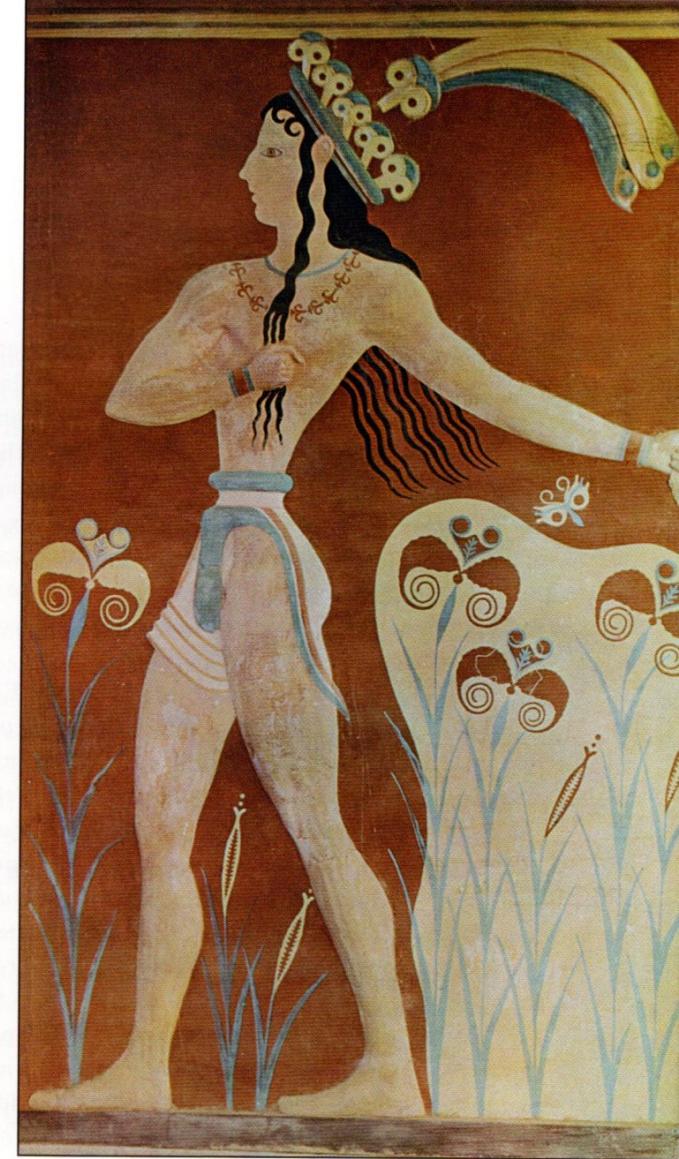
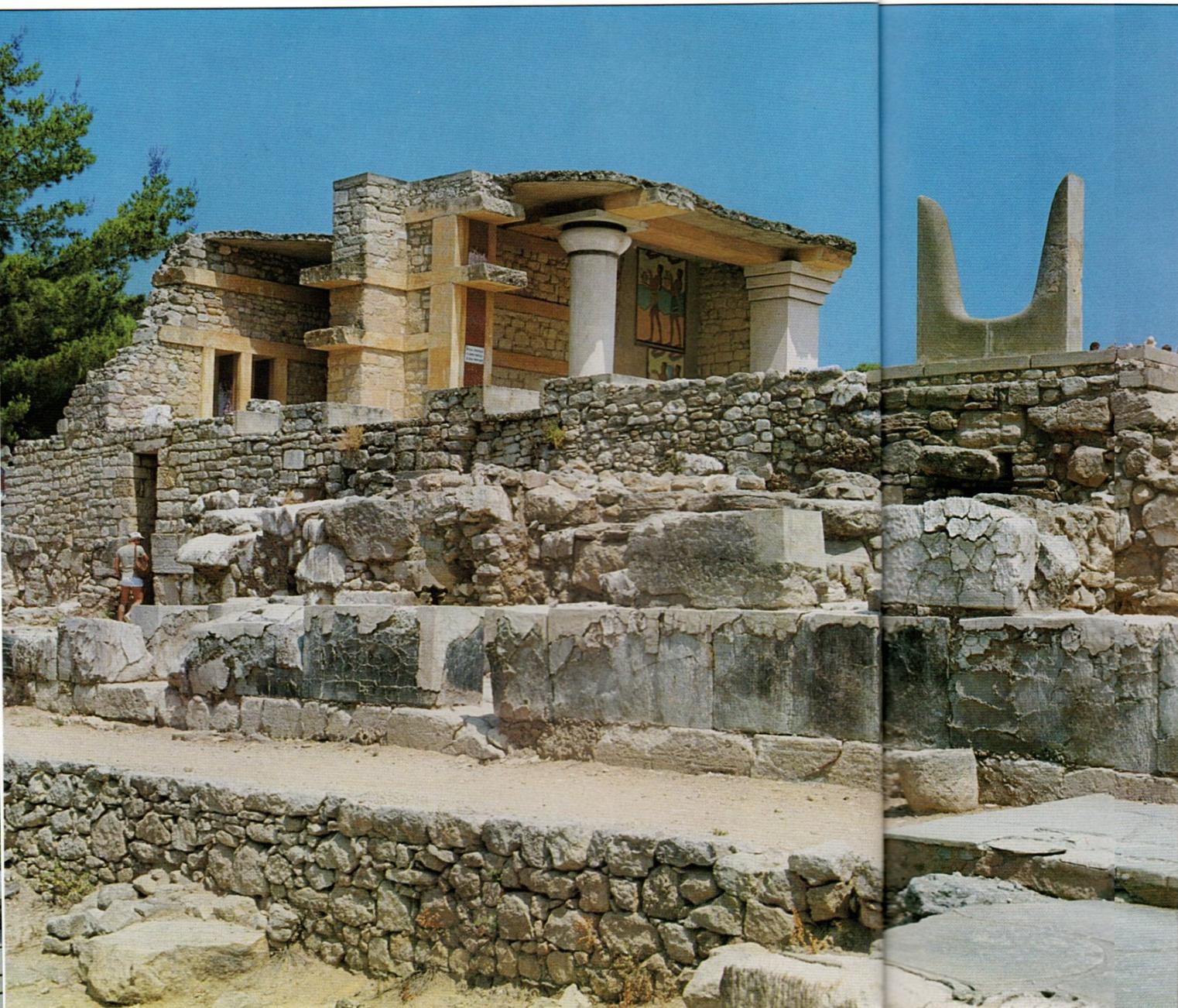
The large Central Court of the palace (ill. 22) covers an area of 50×25m. Beneath its original pavement various remains of the Neolithic settlement at Knossos have been excavated. The ground floor of the west wing was principally intended for religious purposes. At the north edge is the Throne Room (ill. 16a.). Passing through a four-door polythyron, or pier-and-door partition, one descends five steps into an antechamber with gypsum benches around the walls. Between the benches along the north wall a wooden replica of the stone throne from the Throne Room itself has been placed on the exact spot where a heap of charred material was found. This lobby was decorated with wall-paintings. A porphyry basin found nearby has been placed in the centre of it, in its putatively original position. Perhaps this basin was for holy water (ill. 23). The Throne Room proper, which has two entrances, lies to the west and against its north wall stands the renowned "throne of Minos" (ill.16a) which was discovered perfectly preserved and "in situ". Made of gypsum it clearly imitates a wooden prototype. The hollows in the seat were for greater comfort. The splendid high back has an undulating outline and slopes slightly backwards. The throne was covered with a thin coat of red and white painted plaster. There are benches to right and left of it while the wall above was embellished with murals of wingless griffins flanking the throne; fabulous sacred monsters with lion's body and eagle's head, attendants of the deities and guardians of sacred places and objects with were inherited by later Greek mythology and art. These wall-paintings display a rudimentary application of chiaroscuro. Two similar griffins adorn the other walls. This throne, popularly known as the "oldest in Europe" was perhaps not infact intended for Minos but for a High Priestess of the Mother Goddess. Opposite and at a lower lever is a "lustral basin" access to which was by six steps and which was surely for ritual purifications with holy water. Similar lustral basins exist elsewhere in the palace, as well as in the other palaces and villas. Some archaeologists consider them to be ordinary baths, yet they have no drainage system. This lustral basin

had a low parapet of wooden columns, as is deduced from charred traces, and formed the lower part of a light well. The upper parts of the walls were covered with red plaster. The Throne Room and its wall-paintings date perhaps to the period of the Achaean dynasty. The archaeological evidence suggests that some ceremony was being performed here at the very moment of the destruction of the palace and was abruptly interrupted. Perhaps this religious rite was aimed at averting the imminent disaster. West of the Throne Room was a suite of small, dark rooms comprising the so-called "Inner Sanctuary".

Returning to the Central Court and proceeding southwards we come to an impressive staircase with twelve treads and two large columns, one taller than the other, which led directly from the court to the first floor (ill.24). After the staircase and opposite the centre of the court are the ruins of the Tripartite Shrine which was crowned by Horns of Consecration. The central section of the shrine was higher than the lateral ones. This peculiar shrine, which was, in effect, just a facade, is depicted in one of the miniature frescoes from the palace. Still further south we descend into a small paved court which communicates to the north with the "Magazine of the Tall Pithos" (ill.27), and the Temple Repositories. Here, among the treasures of the Tripartite Shrine kept in two rectangular cists sunk in the ground like stone chests, various precious cult objects were revealed; the famous snake goddesses and other exceptional works of art in faience, as well as a large marble cross, a well-known solar symbol. Two doorways on the west side of the paved court lead into two dark, mysterious hypostyle crypts or Pillar Crypts (ill. 25) of indisputably religious character. Each crypt had a large square pillar on which the sacred symbol of the double axe is incised several times. Libations were poured at the base of these pillars which were a schematic representation of the divinity and their cult is a very well-known feature of Minoan religion. Perhaps a relationship exists with the age-old worship in caves or even with the fact that the pillar crypts were an integral element in the stability of a building in a land which suffered from devastating earthquakes. North of the first crypt there are two other dark chambers: the eastern one has been named the "Vat Room".

Behind the suite of cult rooms in the West Wing extends the row of Magazines (ill.29), the largest unit of storerooms in Minoan Crete. In front of it there is a long corridor which had a wooden roof at the beginning and runs

15. The great limestone horns of consecration near the South Entrance.



16. "The Priest-King" or "The Prince of the Lilies".  
Relief fresco. The original is exhibited in the  
Heraklion Archaeological Museum.

parallel with the Central Court. There are eighteen long narrow magazines in all, with pithoi set on stone bases and rectangular chest-like cists set in the floor, within which clothing and diverse precious objects were kept. In some of the magazines the roof has been restored with cement. These extensive storerooms housed a great number of pithoi, perhaps 420, and are indicative of the role played by the palaces in the economic life of the island, in the trading and redistribution of produce. When the palace was destroyed the burning oil in the pithoi left the greasy black traces still visible on the gypsum slabs. There were pithoi in the corridor too, as well as chests coated internally with plaster for the storage of liquids.

On the other side of the Central Court is the East Wing of the palace with the royal apartments. Whereas the West Wing consisted of the ground floor and two upper storeys, the East Wing had four storeys, since it was set into a deep cutting in the hillside two storeys deeper than the level of the court. Intercommunication between the ground floor, the floors of the royal quarters and the Central Court was facilitated by the Grand Staircase (ill. 26), a truly monumental achievement of Minoan architecture with a capacious light-well to the east, the colonnades of which stood on a stepped parapet. There were verandahs around the other two sides of the light-well, while on the southern one there was a window instead of columns. The broad steps are shallow and very easy to negotiate. The Grand Staircase was preserved more or less intact during excavation, protected inside the deep cutting into the slope. At the far end of the lightwell is the Hall of the Colonnades (ill. 37) with four massive columns. Beyond this a corridor commences in the middle of which was a door as is deduced from the use marks left on the paved floor. The corridor leads to one of the larger rooms in the palace, the Hall of the Double Axes (ill. 32), thus named after this sacred symbol which was carved several times on the walls of the light-well to the west. The Hall is divided by a polythyron and there was a throne on its north wall, possibly with a canopy above, affixed to four fluted wooden colonnettes. The throne was, in all likelihood, of the same type as encountered previously. There was a gypsum dado around the walls and above this they were plastered and painted with spiral decoration. It is supposed that the distinctive Minoan figure eight oxhide shields, which protected the whole body, hung on the north wall. The floors were paved with



16a.

*The Throne Room  
with the Griffin Fresco.*

gypsum flags. Other polythyra on the east and south side led into a wide portico with square pillar in the corner and beyond this there may have been an open terrace overlooking the valley of the river Kairatos.

A narrow passage leads from the Hall of the Double Axes to the so-called Queen's Megaron (ill. 35). Windows on the south and east sides open onto two light-wells; some of them and the benches beneath them have been restored. The wall-paintings here are of considerable importance and include the Dolphin fresco (ill. 51) which depicts these intelligent creatures frolicking in the sea, surrounded by flying fish. The dolphins are deep blue with white bellies and a yellow band along their sides. Certain details of this fresco, such as the sea spray, are quite remarkable. A border of coral frames the entire composition. At a later date another wall-painting of spirals covered the first. The originals are in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum (ill. 51) along with that of the charming dancing girl with long, billowing tresses (ill. 43). In this room different phases of floor construction can be discerned. A narrow flight of steps leads to the upper storey which may have been the original home of the Dolphin Fresco, for it possibly adorned a shrine dedicated to the goddess of the sea. West of the "Megaron" is a small room thought to have been a bathroom (ill. 33, 34), though the clay bath tub, of the same type as used as coffins, may not actually have stood where we see it today. According to a more recent and plausible interpretation this was in fact a bed chamber. A dark corridor decorated with spiral frescoes leads from the "Queen's Megaron" to the "Queen's Dressing Room", as it has been called, and to the lavatory which would have had a wooden seat and was connected up with the palace's elaborate plumbing system. The entire installation is remarkable for the time, but the Minoans' love of cleanliness is renowned. Beyond is a light-well known as the Court of the Distaffs because the sign of the distaff (if indeed this is what is represented) is incised on its walls. In a nearby room, a kind of treasury, diverse precious objects were discovered, including a tiny gold fish. Further on a service staircase leads to the upper floor where there are several restored rooms.

The southern sector of the East Wing also contains several interesting places. In one room with a low plaster partition a clay bathtub is still preserved. Actually inside this partition a number of vases decorated with white lilies were



found. The whole suite of rooms, which is associated with an adjacent lustral basin, perhaps belonged to a priest. After the 1600 BC destruction the apartment was completely filled in and served as a base for a new one which was built upon it. Of especial interest is the square Shrine of the Double Axes to the south (ill. 31) which was converted into a shrine in Postpalatial times. The room is divided into three sections, each at a different level. In the northernmost there is a pebbled bench on which diverse cult objects were arrayed, such as two pairs of plaster sacral horns with small holes in the centre for affixing double axes or small branches. The shrine was thus named after a small steatite double axe with double-honed edges found there. Various clay figurines were also found on this ledge, one representing the familiar Minoan goddess with arms raised in a gesture of blessing and a dove perched symbolically on her head (ill. 46). Her bell-shaped skirt is reminiscent of a crinoline. This type of figurine was common in later Minoan times. Several vases and a tripod altar were found in front of this ledge. West of the Shrine of the Double Axes is a corridor in which clay Linear B tablets, in the Greek language but with Minoan characters, (ill. 48) were brought to light.

Beyond this complex of rooms, which has another light-well, a lustral basin and a flight of stairs, and which delineates the southeast corner of the palace there are several private houses constituting part of the town. The closest, nowadays roofed with cement, has been called the House of the Chancel Screen. It has a lustral basin, three magazines and a crypt with a square pillar in the middle. In the centre of the building is a spacious hall with polythyra (pier and door partitions). Next to it is the so-called South-east House and close to this a kiln. West of the first house are two smaller ones, the House of the Sacrificed Oxen and the House of the Fallen blocks, separated by a paved street. The first house, with an L-shaped room, perhaps belonged to a stone-cutter. The other, with four rooms, was named after several huge blocks which had fallen from a wall of the palace and had destroyed it. The weight of some of these blocks, in excess of a ton, indicates the terrific intensity of the earthquake.

Returning to the royal quarters, we pass along a long corridor which divides the east wing into two and so enter its north sector which housed the palace workshops. In this corridor too numerous Linear B tablets were found.

A portal at its east end leads into the Lobby of the Wooden Posts, so named after the beams used to reinforce the walls, imparting resilience as an anti-seismic precaution in accordance with the usual method in Minoan architecture. Next to it is the Eastern Portico with four columns and a staircase to the south. It was built after the destruction of 1500 BC. West of this portico is the Lapidary's Workshop in which unworked blocks of basalt ("lapis Lacedaemonius") were found, imported from a Spartan quarry and used for the manufacture of high quality stone vases. Some of these blocks bear traces of working, which was suddenly interrupted by the destruction of the palace. The main workshops were probably in the upper storey, the provenance of a number of half-finished stone vases. The room to the north is known as the Schoolroom on account of the benches around three of its walls with stone basins beside them. It has been interpreted either as a school for apprentice scribes, or as an atelier of student painters or potters. It was re-used during the "reoccupation" period. The "Schoolroom" is linked with the so-called Court of the Stone Spout, named after the end of a drainage pipe, visible high up on the west wall, which conveyed water from the light-well into a small cistern which was connected to a well. In the southwest corner of the court the famous Toreador Fresco, which vividly portrays the dangerous sport of bull-leaping in which girls clad in male clothing also participated (ill. 40), hangs. Along the side of the Central Court runs the Corridor of the Bays, a conventional name given on account of its three blind magazines. At the far end was a doorway. Various interesting objects were found in nearby rooms, such as Kamares vases, clay models of royal palanquins and, last but not least, the well-known "Town Mosaic", a series of faience plaques depicting the facades of houses, an invaluable source of information on hitherto unknown details of Minoan architecture. Adjacent to the Corridor of the Bays is the long magazine of the Medallion Pithoi in which some of these enormous storage jars with relief medallion decoration are still "in situ". Nearby the wall-painting of the elegant Minoan "Ladies in blue" was revealed (ill. 53). In one small room were perhaps the remains of a colossal statue of the Goddess, apparently some three metres high and mainly of wood, like the Archaic xoana, as perhaps indicated by the charred heap, which had fallen from the upper storey together with three bronze locks of hair which were perhaps originally gilded. These remains



18.

The «Temple - Tomb».  
(Reconstruction C. Iliakis).



19.

The great royal "Temple - Tomb" at the south end of the town of Knossos.



17.

Reconstruction  
of the Stepped  
Portico.  
(Reconstruction  
C. Iliakis).

are the sole - and uncertain- testimony of the existence of large statues in the Minoan era, though they were certainly not numerous.

The East Bastion forms the east entrance to the palace, low down and facing the Kairatos valley. It has the appearance of a bastion with flights of stairs inside, but is not in fact a fortification work despite its name. Alongside each flight of steps runs a steep, open conduit for rain water, the bottom of which describes a parabolic curve to break the force of water flow by creating a succession of small waterfalls to avoid splashing. The ingenuity of the constructor is indeed impressive. There are small settling tanks at intervals to filter out the sediment and it was believed initially that the area below the East Bastion was the palace laundry. According to another viewpoint the arena for bull-sports was located here.

Mounting a large staircase leading to the Central Court, we observe on our right the Magazines of the Giant Pithoi, part of the storerooms of the East Wing of the Early palace. These pithoi have several handles and bear relief decoration imitating the rope tied around their body for reinforcement. The gigantic proportions of these pithoi brings to mind the myth of Glaukos, son of Minos, who fell into just such a jar full of honey and was drowned. There are other Early palace magazines to the north, in which Kamares style vases were found, while to the west is the Corridor of the Draughtboard, so named after the famous royal gaming board brought to light there. This game, from the end of the Middle Minoan period, somewhat reminiscent of chess, was made of gilded ivory inset with squares of rock crystal and faience. Close by four large conical pawns of ivory were found, possibly used as dice. Under the floor of this corridor part of the complex plumbing system of the palace can be seen, indeed remarkable for those early times.

From the north of the Central Court a long, narrow corridor, the North Entrance passage (ill.30) leads to the north entrance to the palace. This was an unroofed, paved passage with a steep downward gradient. Some time later two structures resembling bastions were erected on either side, considerably reducing its width. Porticoes were built on top of these "bastions" at the same height as the Court. The West Portico has been restored and is accessible via a small stairway. A copy of the enormous relief fresco of a charging bull, of the end of the Middle Minoan period, has been placed in its original position (ill.

28). It has been supposed that the scene represented a bull-fight or the capture of a wild bull in nets, a subject also illustrated in relief on the renowned gold cups from Vapheio near Sparta, which are generally regarded as being of Minoan workmanship. The fierce creature is rendered in a most convincing manner and beside it is an olive tree with colourful foliage. Part of a human figure can be discerned on one fresco fragment. A similar wall-painting perhaps embellished the other bastion. This enormous picture of a bull, which is thought to have survived into later Greek times, may, it is said, have played a role in the formulation of the legend of the Minotaur.

The North Entrance Passage leads through a doorway with adjacent porter's lodge, into a spacious hypostyle hall with two rows of eight square pillars and two terminal columns. This hall has been rather fancifully named the Customs House, since it was next to the sea gate of the palace (ill. 10a). In actual fact it was probably a banqueting hall with another room above. There is a gateway on the west side of the "Customs House".

In the southwest corner of the Central Court and to the west of the North Entrance passage stands a rectangular structure with very deep foundations and rounded corners, a remnant of the Early Palace. It has been named the North Keep and is considered to have been one of the insulae, the independent architectural units which, according to Evans, formed the first palace. Inside there are six very deep, narrow rooms, probably magazines, known as the "cells" or "dungeons", which were subsequently filled in with earth. A shrine with paved floor and central pillar was erected on top. The walls of one of the rooms in the new structure were decorated with two well-known miniature paintings, the "Sacred Grove" and the "Tripartite Shrine". In a nearby room the "Saffron Gatherer fresco" a monkey in a meadow of crocuses was found. Since the head of the animal was missing, it was initially thought to depict a young boy.

Outside the palace, at a short distance from the gateway of the "Customs House" is a restored North Lustral Basin (ill. 36) with a staircase with stepped parapet and columns. There was a gypsum dado around its walls and above these were frescoes imitating sponge impressions. Beyond, to the northwest, lies the "Theatral Area" of Knossos (ill. 39), a rectangular paved space with tiers of seats along two sides and a bastion-like structure at their



junction, a kind of “Royal Box”. Perhaps from here the royal family and some 500 seated spectators watched such spectacles as religious ceremonies or even wrestling or boxing bouts. A conduit alongside the seats was for collecting rainwater. This “Theatre” maybe copies the earlier corresponding structure at the palace of Phaistos . It is from the “Theatral Area” that the well-paved “Royal Road” (ill. 38), the “oldest road in Europe”, commences. On either side there are private houses, such as the “Arsenal”, in which tablets recording a large number of arrows were found, and the “House of the Frescoes” with scenes of plants, monkeys and birds.

The Royal Road leads directly to the main road north of the palace and the famous Little palace. A columned propylon forms the main entrance and a paved peristyle court extends in front of the main hall of the building, connected with it by a polythyron. An identical polythyron divides the hall into two. During the final phase of the building’s habitation a lustral basin to the west was converted into a shrine in which sacral horns and four pieces of stalagmite, vaguely resembling human forms, were found. In the southwest corner of the building there was a lavatory installation connected to a drain outside. A gypsum staircase next to the court led to the upper storey. In the south sector of the building there was a basement with two crypts containing square pillars. The most important find from the Little Palace is the splendid bull’s-head rhyton (ill. 44), a libation vessel of black steatite which originally had gilded wooden horns. Only one of the eyes was preserved, of rock crystal painted on the underside. This vessel ranks among the masterpieces of Minoan art.

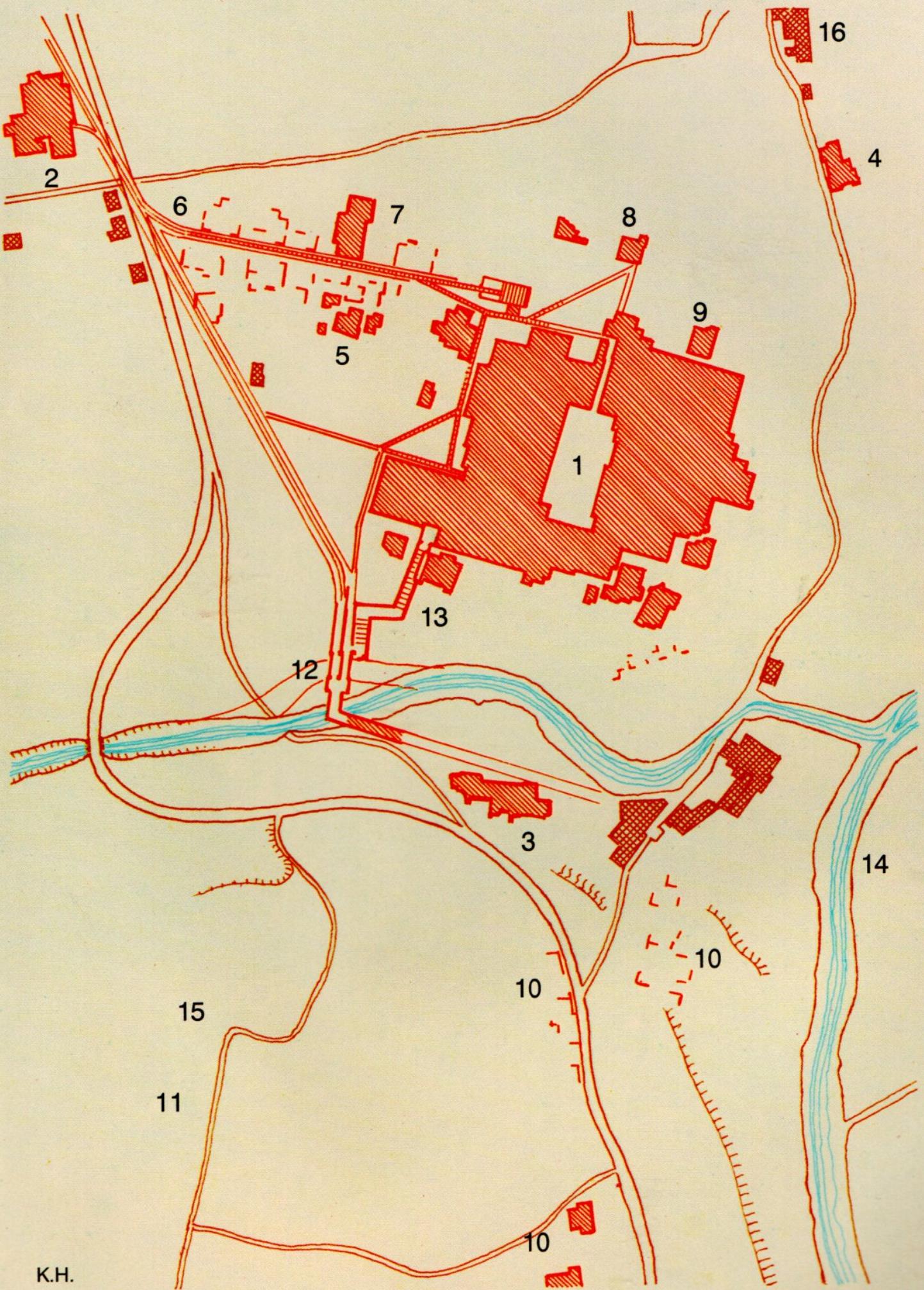
**19b. Knossos. Topography of the area (plan C. Iliakis).**

1. *The Palace*
2. *The «Little Palace»*
3. *«Caravan Serai»*
4. *«Royal Villa»*
5. *«House of the Frescoes»*
6. *Minoan road*
7. *«Arsenal»*
8. *«Customs house»*
9. *Northeast house*
10. *Minoan houses*
11. *Minoan quarry*
12. *Minoan bridge*
13. *«Stepped portico»*
14. *River Kairatos*
15. *Gypsades hill*
16. *Modern village of Makrytoichos*

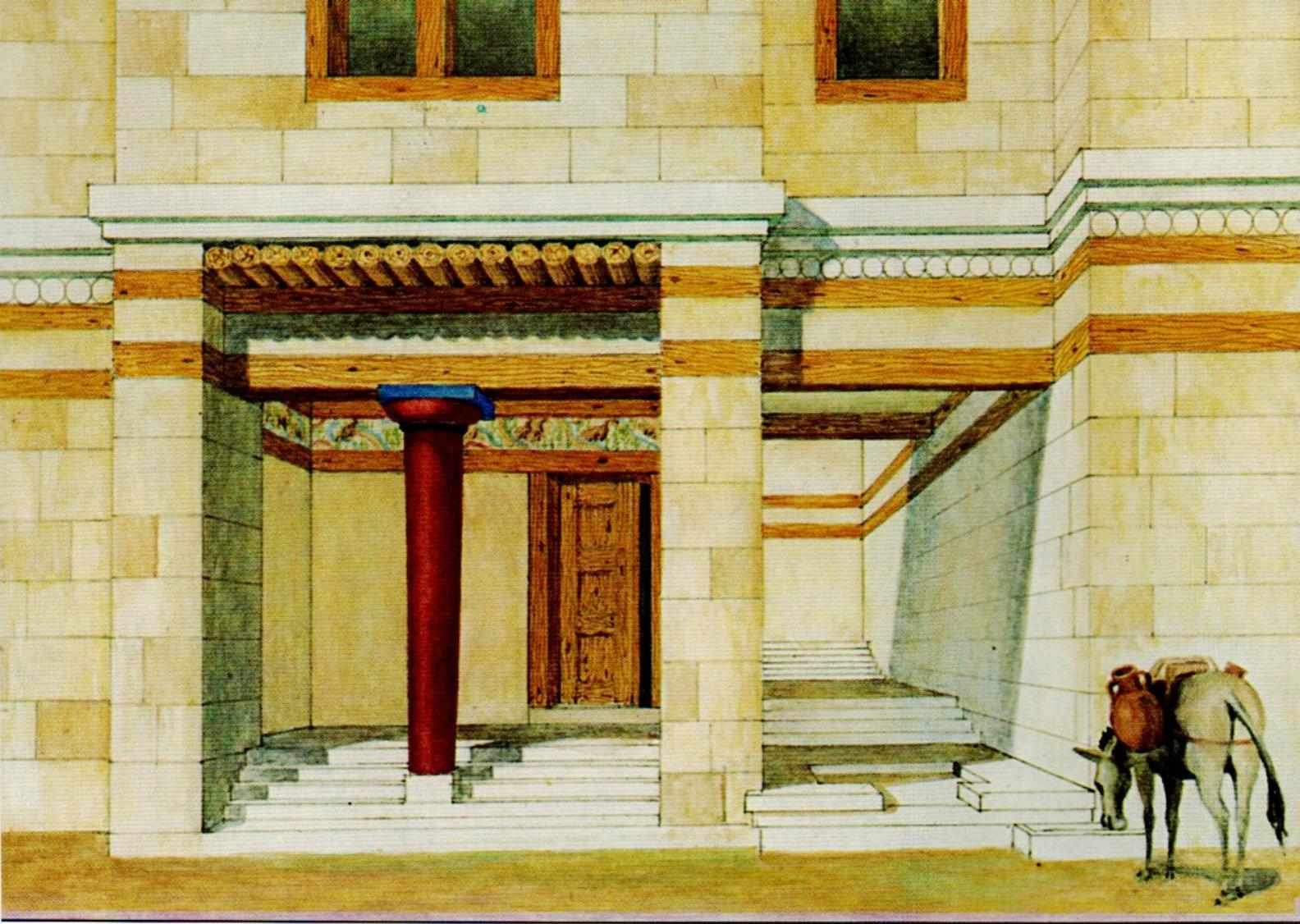


19a.

*The “Queen’s Megaron” and its light-well.*



K.H.



20.

Reconstruction of the *Caravanserai*. (After Evans).



22.

Reconstruction of the west side of the Central Court.  
(Reconstruction C. Iliakis).

21.

The Partridge Fresco from the "Caravanserai". The round objects represent veined pebbles. The largest part of the fresco is restored.

(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).

23.

The antechamber of the Throne Room with a porphyry basin, perhaps for holy water.

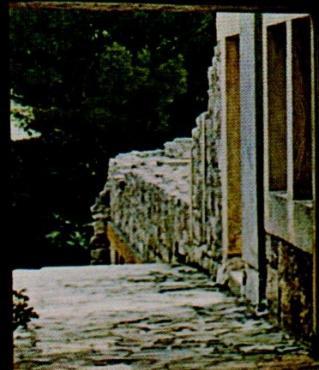


25.

Pillar Crypts of the west wing.

24.

Restored light-well of the upper storey of the West Wing with replicas of frescoes.





26.

*Grand Staircase of the East Wing: The “Veranda of the Royal Guard”. In the background a replica of the fresco with figure-of-eight shields.*

28.

*The partly restored west portico of the North Entrance Passage with a copy of the relief fresco of the charging bull. The original is exhibited in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum.*

27. *The “Tall Pithos” in the West Wing of the palace. This huge jar has a very rich decoration.*



29.

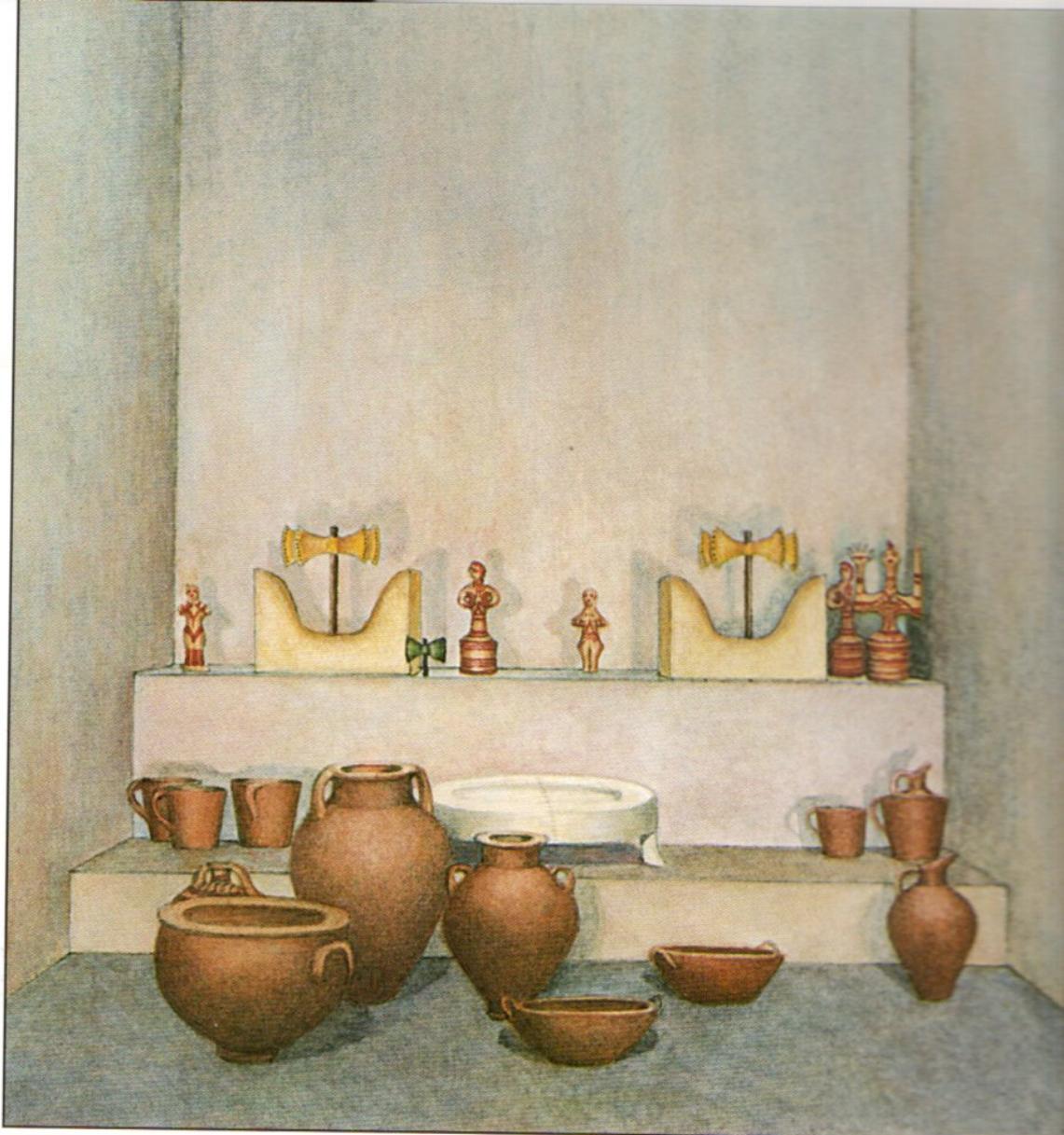
*Magazine of the West Wing, with pithoi and sunken cists in the floor.*





30.

North Entrance Passage.  
(After Piet de Jong).

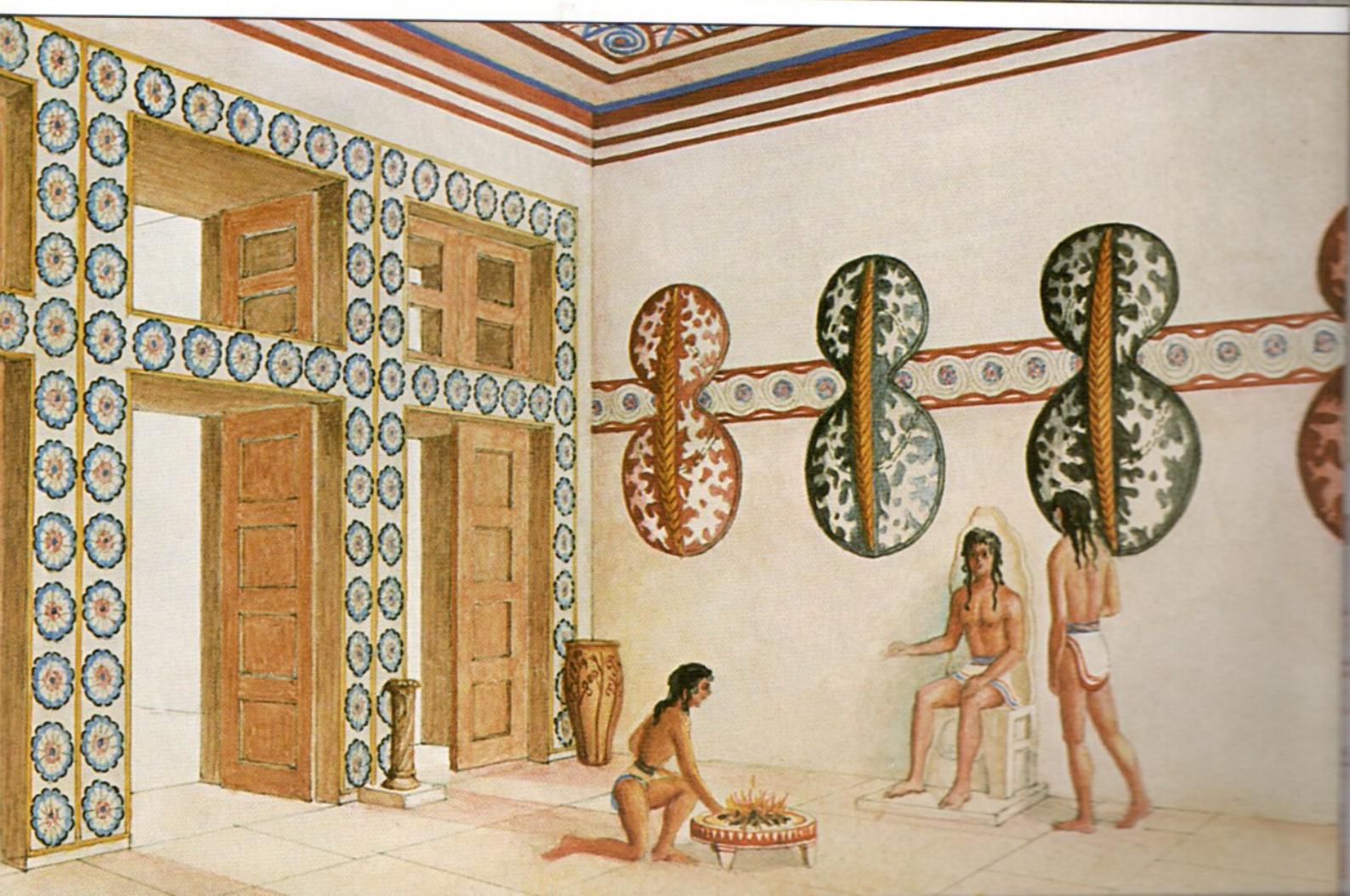


31.

Sanctuary of the Double Axes. (Reconstruction  
C. Iliakis).

32.

Hall of the Double Axes.  
(After Piet de Jong).





33.  
*The bathroom of the  
“Queen’s Megaron”.*

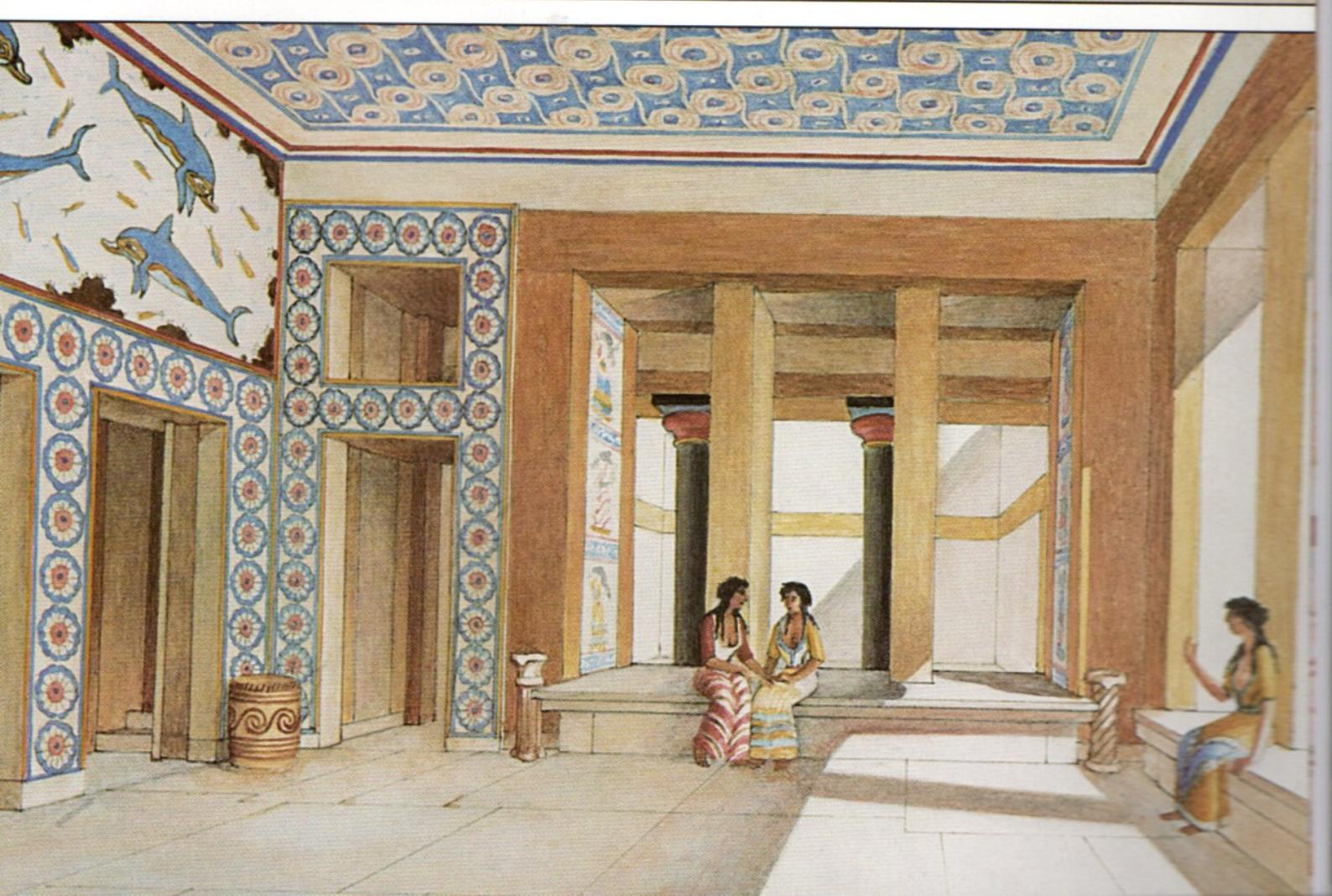
34.

The bathroom of the  
“Queen’s Megaron”  
(After Piet de Jong).



35.

“Queen’s Megaron”.  
(After Piet de Jong).



38.

The "Royal Road" connecting the  
"Theatral Area" with the Little Palace.



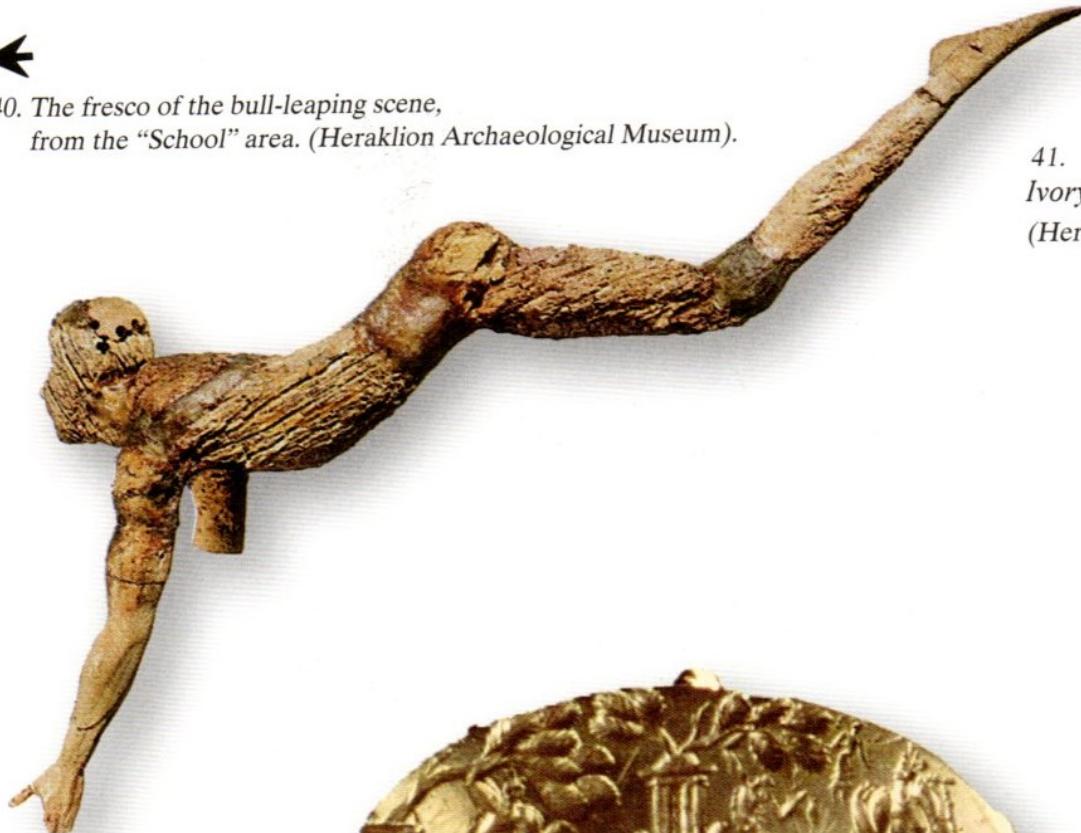
39. General view of the "Theatral Area" of the  
palace, with two "causeways".







40. The fresco of the bull-leaping scene,  
from the "School" area. (Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



41.  
*Ivory Acrobat. From Knossos.*  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



42. The "ring of King Minos".  
1450-1400 B.C.  
Area Temple-Tomb Knossos.  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



43.  
*Girl Dancer Fresco from the  
"Queen's Megaron".*  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



44.  
*Rhyton in the  
shape of a  
bull's head.  
From the  
"Little  
Palace" of  
Knossos.*

(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).

45.

Temple Repositories: The great  
faience "Snake Goddess".  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



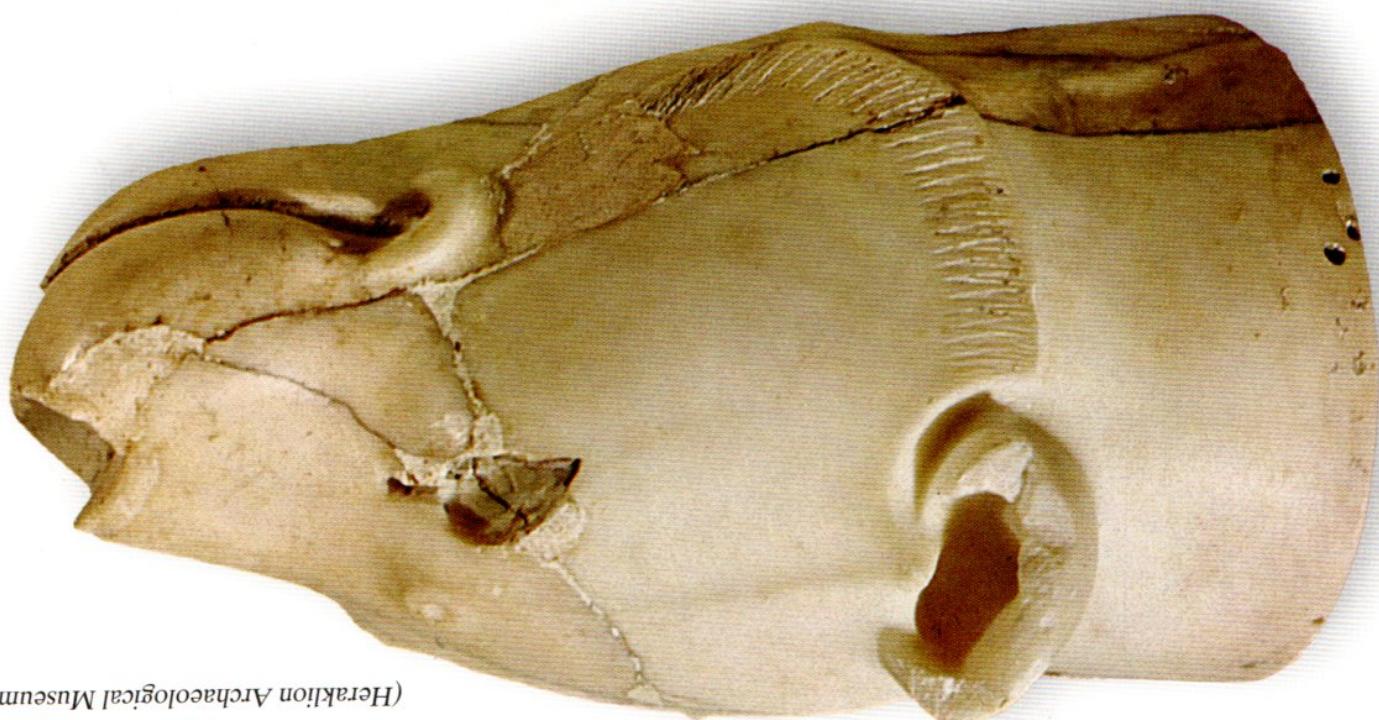
Temple Repositories: The small faience  
"Snake Goddess".  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).





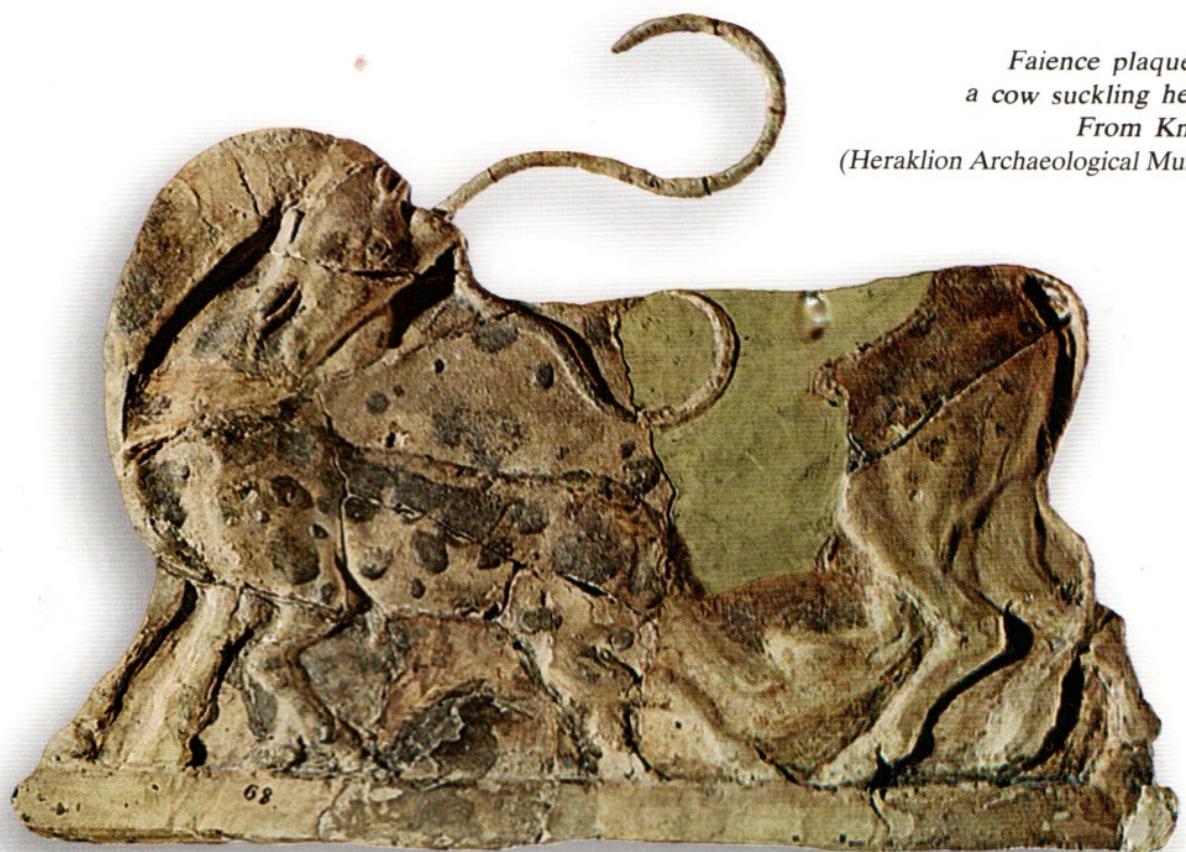
47.  
Rhynon of white  
limestone in form  
of a lioness' head.  
Palace of Knossos.  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).

48.



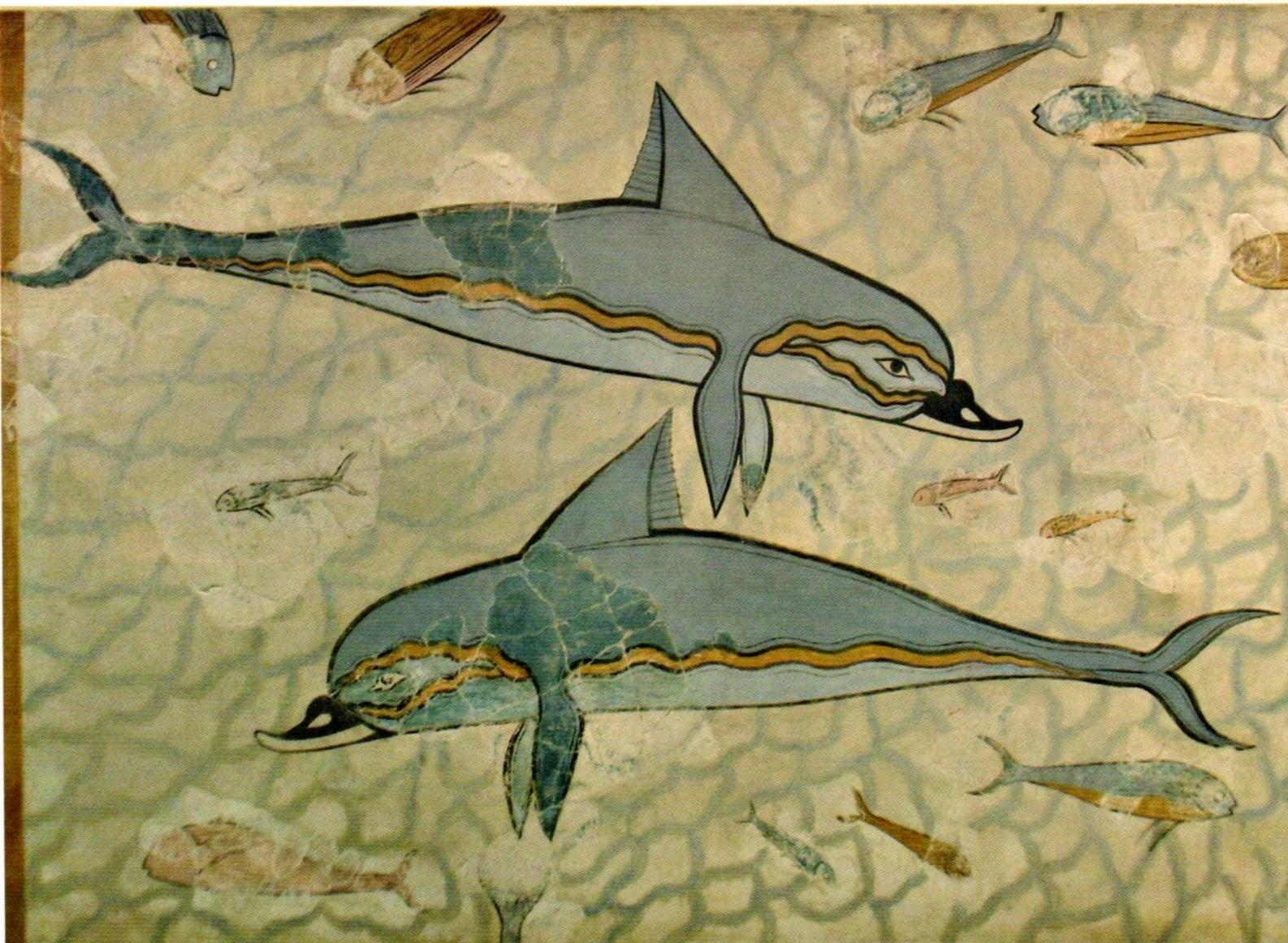
47.  
Rhynon of white  
limestone in form  
of a lioness' head.  
Palace of Knossos.  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).

*Faience plaque with  
a cow suckling her calf*  
*From Knossos.*  
*(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).*



50. The "Blue Bird". Fresco from the "House of the Frescoes". (Heraklion Archaeological Museum).





51.

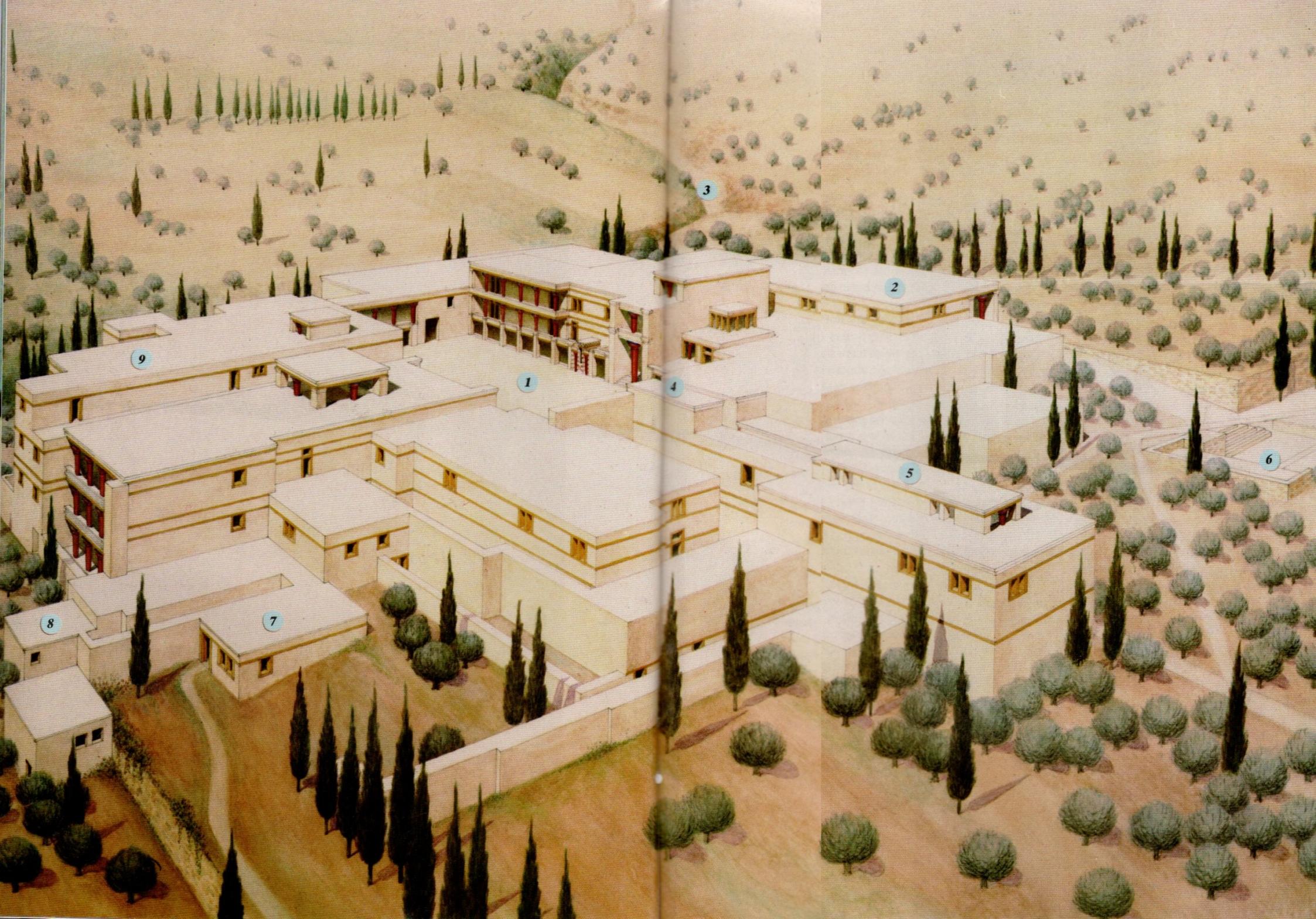
*The Dolphin Fresco from the  
“Queen’s Megaron”. This  
picture expresses the love of the  
Minoans for the sea.  
(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).*



52.  
*Sacred winged griffins.*  
*Relief mural from*  
*the first floor*  
*of the east wing.*  
*Palace of Knossos.*  
*(Heraklion Archaeological Museum).*



53. The "Ladies in Blue". Fresco from the East Wing. (Heraklion Archaeological Museum).



9

1

4

2

5

6

8

7

# KNOSSOS

## RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF THE PALACE

This reconstruction drawing of the palace of Knossos by the artist Costis Iliakis illustrates the building from the NE. The details of the reconstruction, especially of the upper parts of the building are rather putative, but in general it is based on the excavation data.

The palace of Knossos, covering an area of 20,000 sq. metres, is the foremost palace, in size and importance, of Minoan Crete. It was built in around 1900 BC and two main constructional phases can be distinguished: the Early Palace, which was destroyed, possibly by earthquake, in about 1700 BC and the New Palace, built on more or less the same site. The final destruction of the palace occurred in around 1375 BC or maybe later.

The English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans commenced excavations in the year 1900. Most of the buildings we see today, restored to a great extent, belong to the New Palace. Some sections of the palace are more easily discernible in the reconstruction drawing, such as the Central Court (1), the structural epicentre of the building as well as the fulcrum of life within it.

In contrast to the Early Palatial "Magazines of the Giant Pithoi" (7), the enormous West Magazines (2) in which hundreds of pithoi were stored, are barely visible in the background. Behind them the Vlychia stream can be seen (3). One of the most significant sectors of the West Wing, which was dedicated to cult, is without doubt the Throne Room (4) on the ground floor, in which there is the stone "throne of Minos" or perhaps of Ariadne, flanked by two wingless griffins, sacred mythical beasts, guardians of holy places and objects. The northernmost part of the palace was the "Customs House" (5) as a large hall next to the sea gate has been imaginatively named. Beyond is the "Theatral Area" (6) where some 500 spectators could watch religious rituals and spectacles. Finally, projecting from the multi-storeyed East Wing (9) is the "East Bastion" (8), the east gate of the palace.

COSTIS DAVARAS  
Emeritus Ephor of Antiquities





ISBN: 978-618-5235-10-9